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TELEMORPHOSIS

MASHINES, EXPERIMENT, HYPERREAL, OBSCENE, POP, PORNO, SIMULATION,
NECROPOLITICS TELEMORPHOSIS, TRANSPARENCY

All quotations are taken from the book Telemorphosis

There will soon be nothing more than self-communicating zombies, whose lone umbilical relay will be their own feedback image – electronic avatars of dead shadows who, beyond death and the river Styx, will wander, perpetually passing their time retelling their own story.

And people are fascinated, fascinated and terrified by the indifference of the Nothing-to-say,

Nothing-to-do, by indifference to their own existence.

Here, television succeeded in completing a fantastic operation of directed consensus building, a real power grab, an OPA [Tender offer] to the entire society, a kidnapping – an unheralded success story on the path towards an integral telemorphosis of society. Television created a global event (or better, a non-event), in which everyone became trapped. “A total social fact” as Marcel Mauss says – if in other societies this situation indicated the converging power of all the elements of the social, in our society it indicates the elevation of an entire society to the parody stage of an integral farce, of an image feedback relentless with its own reality. What the most radical critical critique, the most subversive delirious imagination, what no Situationist drift could have done... television has done.

The worst part of this obscenity, this shameless visibility, is the forced participation, this automatic complicity of the spectator who has been blackmailed into participating. And it is this which is the clearest objective of the operation: the servitude of the victims, but a voluntary servitude, one in which the victims rejoice from the pain and shame which they are made to suffer. The complete participation of a society in its fundamental mechanism: interactive exclusion – it doesn't get better than that! Decided all together and consumed with enthusiasm.

We are dealing with a genuine Stockholm syndrome on a mass scale – when the hostage becomes the accomplice of the hostage taker – as well as a revolution of the concept of voluntary servitude and master-slave relations. When the entire society becomes an accomplice to those who took it hostage, but just as much when individuals split into, for themselves, hostage and hostage taker.

Our entire reality has become experimental. In the absence of any stable destiny, modern man has reached the point of unlimited experimentation on himself.

In this manner, the artificial microcosm of Loft Story [french version of Big Brother] is identical to Disneyland, which provides the illusion of the real external world, while if one looks deeper, one realizes they are one and the same. The entire United States is Disneyland and we are all on Loft Story. No need to enter into the idea of the virtual double of reality, we are already there – the televisual universe is nothing more than a holographic detail of global reality. All the way up to, and including, the most daily parts of our existence, we are already within a situation of experimental reality. And it is precisely from this that we have the fascination, by immersion, of spontaneous interactivity.[...]

In the end, all of this comes from the desire to be Nothing and to be looked at as such. There are two manners of disappearing: either we demand not to be seen (this is the current problem concerning image rights), or we immerse ourselves in the delirious exhibitionism of its nullity. We make ourselves nothing, a loser, in order to be seen as nothing – the ultimate protection against the necessity of existing and the obligation of being one's self.

It is from this that we get the simultaneous contradictory situation of not being seen and being perpetually visible. Everyone wants it both ways, and no legislation or ethics can get to the

bottom of this dilemma – the unconditional right of being able to view and at the same time to not be viewed in return. Complete information access is part of human rights and with it we also find a forced visibility and over-exposure to the lighting of information.

The corruption of power is to inscribe into the real everything which is found in dreams...

There is a long history of this growing promiscuity, from the glorification of daily life and its irruption within the historical dimension – up until the implacable immersion into the real all too real, into the human all too human, into the banal and residual. But the last decade saw an extraordinary acceleration of this banalization of the world, by the relay of information and universal communication – and above all by the fact that this banality has become experimental. The field of banality is no longer merely residual; it has become a theatre of operations. Brought to the screen, as is the case with *Loft Story*, it becomes an object of experimental leisure and desire. A verification of what Marshall McLuhan stated about television: that it is a perpetual test, and we are subjected to it like guinea pigs, in an automatic mental interaction.

Somewhere, we all mourn this stripped reality, this residual existence, this total disillusion. And there is, within this entire story of the Loft, a collective work of mourning. But a mourning which is part of the solidarity between the criminals themselves that we all are – the murderers of this crime perpetrated against real life, and the wallowing confession made to the screen, which in some ways becomes our literal confessional (the confessional is one of the key sites of *Loft Story*). Here we see our true mental corruption – in the consumption of this deception and mourning which becomes a contradictory source of pleasure. In any case, nevertheless, the disavowal of this experimental masquerade is reflected in the deadly boredom that emanates from it.

Hence the other question, taking the place as a final interrogation: WHO WAS LAUGHING IN THE LOFT (*Big Brother* french version)? Within this material world without a trace of humor, what sort of monster could laugh back-stage? What sort of sarcastic divinity could laugh about all of it from his innermost depths? The human all too human must have turned over in his grave. But as we know very well, human convulsions are a distraction for the gods, who merely laugh at them.

[...]And this, this is radical democracy. The democratic principle was of the order of merit, and equivalence (albeit relative) between merit and recognition. Here, in the Loft, there is no equivalence between merit and glory. It is everything in exchange for nothing. A complete principle of inequivalence. The democratic illusion is thus elevated to the highest degree: the maximal exaltation for a minimal qualification. And, while the traditional principle merely insured a partial recognition for merit, the operation of the Loft insures a virtual glory to everyone in terms of the absence of merit itself. On one hand, it is the end of democracy, by the extinction of any qualification of merit whatsoever, but on the other hand, it is the result of an even more radical democracy on the basis of the beatification of the man without qualities. It is a great step towards democratic nihilism.

One of the signs of this [screen] promiscuity is the compulsion of confinement which we see flourishing everywhere – whether it is like the confinement seen in *Loft Story* or that of an island,

a gated community, a luxury ghetto, or any space where people recreate in an experimental nest or privileged zone – some sort of equivalent space of initiation where the laws of open society are abolished. It is no longer about protecting a symbolic territory but of closing oneself off with one's own self-image, to live promiscuously with it as in a nest, in an incestuous complicity with it and with all the effects of transparency and feedback images which are those of a total screen, no longer having anything to do with others but via the relationship of image-to-image.

Truth be told, the reality show itself quickly degenerated into a televisual soap opera that was not that different than old variety shows made for large audiences. And its audience was amplified at the usual rate of competing media, which leads to the self- propagation of the show via a prophetic method: self-fulfilling prophecy. In the end, the ratings for the show play part of the spiral and return cycle of the advertising flame. But all of this is of little interest. It is only the original idea which has any value: submitting a group to a sensory deprivation experiment (Which in other times was a form of calculated torture. But are we not in the middle of exploring all the historical forms of torture, served in homeopathic doses, under the guise of mass culture or avant-garde art? This is precisely one of the principle themes of contemporary art.), in order to record the behavior of human molecules within a vacuum – and no doubt with the design of watching them tear each other apart in the artificial promiscuity. We have not yet reached this point, but this existential micro-situation functions as a universal metaphor for the modern being, holed up in his personal loft, which is no longer his physical or mental universe. It is his digital and tactile universe, of Turing's "spectral body", of the digital man, captured within the labyrinth of the networks, of man turned into his own (white) mouse.

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Foto: Sylvia John

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